COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
BY BILL MOYERS
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I OFTEN WONDER AT COMMENCEMENTS IF A STRANGER FROM ONE GENERATION CAN SAY MUCH THAT IS HELPFUL TO MEMBERS OF ANOTHER GENERATION STANDING ON A DIFFERENT DOORSTEP IN TIME. JUST AS A LIFE IS A PARTICULAR LIFE, SO A GENERATION LIVES IN ITS OWN UNIQUE TIME. YOU MUST MAKE YOUR OWN MAP INTO THE STRANGE NEW COUNTRY OF THE FUTURE. HERE AT MIDDLEBURY YOU HAVE HAD YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED. LIFE AFTER COLLEGE, I CAN TELL YOU, IS WHERE YOU GET YOUR ANSWERS QUESTIONED, IN YOUR OWN CONVERSATION WITH THE WORLD.

BUT I DO HAVE ONE POINT I WANT TO MAKE TODAY. JUST ONE. ON THE THEORY THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A BAD SHORT SPEECH, I SHOULD MAKE IT AND SIT DOWN. BUT TOMORROW MORNING YOU WILL WISH THIS DAY HAD NOT PASSED SO QUICKLY. TOMORROW MORNING IT WILL HIT YOU THAT WE HAVE THE REST OF OUR LIVES NOT TO BE TOGETHER. AND YOU'LL BE - JUST A LITTLE BIT SAD ABOUT THAT.

LOOK AROUND. NO, I MEAN - REALLY LOOK AROUND. LOOK WHO'S SITTING BESIDE YOU. LOOK WHO'S SITTING BEHIND YOU. IN FRONT. OVER THERE. BACK THERE. ALL AROUND. YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO SEE ALL THESE PEOPLE AGAIN, LIKE THIS. "COMMENCEMENT," MEANS SAYING HELLO TO THE WORLD BUT IT MEANS SAYING GOOD-BYE TO FRIENDS AND FAMILIAR PLACES.

SO I'M GOING TO DO YOU A FAVOR. I'M GOING TO KEEP YOU HERE JUST A LITTLE BIT LONGER. A FEW MINUTES DELAY....BEFORE IT'S AULD LANGE SYNE.

FIRST I WANT TO TELL YOU A STORY ABOUT MONEY. I APOLOGIZE ON A SACRED AND FESTIVE OCCASION FOR TALKING ABOUT MONEY, BUT SOME OF YOU MAY MOVE TO NEW YORK ONE DAY. THEN YOU'LL UNDERSTAND WHY ON THIS OCCASION I TOLD YOU ABOUT AN EARLIER GRADUATE OF MIDDLEBURY WHO MOVED TO NEW YORK SEVERAL YEARS AGO. HE'D BEEN THERE FOR SIX MONTHS, AND HE WAS WALKING HOME ONE NIGHT WHEN A MUGGER STEPPED OUT OF THE SHADOWS BRANDISHING A GUN. "GIVE ME YOUR MONEY OR I'LL BLOW YOUR BRAINS OUT," HE SAID. THE MIDDLEBURY GRADUATE THOUGHT A MINUTE AND THEN REPLIED: "FIRE AWAY, BUDDY. YOU CAN LIVE IN NEW YORK WITHOUT BRAINS BUT YOU CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT MONEY."

WHEREVER YOU MOVE AFTER MIDDLEBURY, YOU WILL LIKELY DISCOVER THAT STORY WAS NOT SO FUNNY AFTER ALL. MONEY IS THE GREAT REINFORCER OF THE REALITY PRINCIPLE, AS I DISCOVERED WHEN OUR THEN TEEN-AGE SON CAME HOME ONE DAY TO ASK FOR A RAISE IN HIS ALLOWANCE. "DON'T YOU KNOW," I SAID, "THAT SOME THINGS IN LIFE ARE WORTH MORE THAN MONEY." "YES, I KNOW," HE ANSWERED, "BUT IT TAKES MONEY TO DATE THEM."

I'M STARTING WITH MONEY BECAUSE I WANT TO BE HONEST WITH YOU. YOUR GENERATION IS GOING TO HAVE TO RUN FAST JUST TO STAND STILL. TIMES HAVE CHANGED SINCE THE ROBISONS AND THE MOYERS FINISHED

GRADUATE SCHOOL THIRTY YEARS AGO. BY 1960 THE AVERAGE 30-YEAR-OLD WHITE MALE -- AND WHITE MALES WERE ABOUT ALL WHO ECONOMICALLY COUNTED OR WERE COUNTED IN 1960 THAT AVERAGE WHITE MALE COULD LOOK FORWARD TO A 49% RISE IN INCOME OVER THE NEXT DECADE AND TO PAYING ONLY 16% OF HIS EARNINGS FOR A MORTGAGE.

IT'S A DIFFERENT STORY NOWADAYS. THE AVERAGE 30-YEAR-OLD TODAY - MALE AND FEMALE - IS LIKELY TO BE MAKING LESS IN REAL DOLLARS THAN 10 YEARS AGO, AND 40% OF THE INCOME - 40%, NOT 16% - WILL GO FOR THE MORTGAGE. ALREADY, MORE AND MORE PEOPLE ARE FINDING A MIDDLE-CLASS STANDARD OF LIVING HARD TO ACHIEVE AND HARD TO MAINTAIN. THOSE WHO MANAGE IT USUALLY DO SO BY SENDING MORE FAMILY MEMBERS TO WORK, WORKING LONGER HOURS ON MULTIPLE JOBS, MARRYING LATER, HAVING FEWER CHILDREN, DELAYING THE PURCHASE OF A HOME, TAKING ON MORE DEBT, AND SPENDING BIGGER CHUNKS OF INCOME FOR TODAY'S NEEDS INSTEAD OF FOR THE FUTURE. THE NEW ECONOMICS ARE CHANGING OUR SOCIAL FABRIC, AFFECTING THE WAY WE RAISE OUR CHILDREN, THE RELATIONSHIP OF SPOUSES, AND HOW COMMUNITIES WORK. AROUND NEW YORK, FOR EXAMPLE, VILLAGES AND TOWNS THAT ONCE RELIED ON VOLUNTEER FIREMEN NOW HAVE TROUBLE ENLISTING NEW RECRUITS BECAUSE YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE TO WORK SUCH LONG HOURS AND COMMUTE SO FAR THEY HAVE LITTLE TIME FOR WHAT ONCE WAS A CIVIC DUTY.

WHILE YOU WERE ATTENDING HIGH SCHOOL AND FINISHING MIDDLEBURY, THE ECONOMY HAS BEEN A ROLLER-COASTER, ITS BEHAVIOR ERRATIC. WE'VE EXPERIENCED THE WORST RECESSION SINCE THE 1930S. OUR MANUFACTURING BASE HAS DETERIORATED. THERE WAS A BURST OF SPECULATION IN STOCK AND BONDS UNEQUALLED SINCE 1929, FOLLOWED BY THE BIGGEST STOCK MARKET COLLAPSE IN NEARLY SIX DECADES, FOLLOWED NOW BY NEW HIGHS FOR THE DOW JONES INDEX. ONE DAY EARLIER THIS WEEK THE SAME FRONT PAGE OF THE NEWSPAPER I WAS READING FEATURED ONE HEADLINE PROCLAIMING THE DAZZLING PERFORMANCE OF THE MARKET AND ANOTHER HEADLINE DESCRIBING THE STAGNATION OF THE ECONOMY HERE IN NEW ENGLAND. IT WAS LIKE READING ON ONE PAGE NEWS FROM TWO COUNTRIES.

LISTEN IN SOME QUARTERS AND YOU WILL HEAR SOME TOUGH PREDICTIONS OF THE FUTURE. YOU'LL HEAR IT SAID THAT LIKE EMPIRES OF THE PAST WHICH LIVED BEYOND THEIR MEANS AND TOOK NO THOUGHT OF THE MORROW, THE UNITED STATES HAS BEGUN AN IRREVERSIBLE SLIDE, THAT BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN CUTTING BACK ON OUR INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION AND LETTING OUR INFRASTRUCTURE CRUMBLE, WHILE GOVERNING OURSELVES SO FOOLISHLY, OUR PROBLEMS WILL INTENSIFY. EVEN IF THE TRENDS REVERSE -- EVEN IF WAGES AND INCOMES GET BETTER -- SOME PEOPLE SAY THE SLOW GROWTH AND THE GREED WILL HAVE DONE TOO MUCH DAMAGE; THE POLARIZATION BETWEEN RICH AND POOR WILL INCREASE, AND THE CLASS DIVISION BETWEEN US WILL BECOME MORE AGGRAVATED. EVEN IF SOME OF YOU DO BETTER INDIVIDUALLY, AS SOME OF YOU WILL, OUR SOCIETY NONETHELESS RUNS THE RISK OF BEING POORER AND LESS JUST, LESS SAFE AND MORE UNEQUAL. YOUR ELDERS HAVE BEEN ON A SPREE, REVELING IN "THE CELEBRATION OF INDIVIDUAL CUNNING IN THE SINGLE-MINDED PURSUIT OF WEALTH AND STATUS." BUT MORNING IN

AMERICA IS FOLLOWED BY HIGH NOON; THERE'S ALWAYS A RECKONING. SO YOUR GRADUATION PRESENT IS QUITE A PACKAGE: THE BUDGET DEFICIT, THE TRADE IMBALANCE, THE BURDEN OF DEBT, A DECLINE OF SAVINGS, CRUMBLING BRIDGES AND TAXES, AN ENDANGERED ENVIRONMENT, AND 32 MILLION PEOPLE IN POVERTY. NOW FOR THE BAD NEWS.

TO COPE WITH THIS DIFFICULT FUTURE, WE ARE BEING TOLD THAT YOUR GENERATION MUST REFLECT THE REALITIES OF A BITTERLY COMPETITIVE WORLD; THAT YOU MUST COMPETE NOT ONLY WITH EACH OTHER - THE VERY PEOPLE SITTING BESIDE YOU IN THOSE CHAIRS - BUT WITH OTHER NATIONS. THERE'S TRUTH IN THIS, CONSIDERABLE TRUTH. BUT IT'S NOT THE WHOLE TRUTH.

FOR ONE THING, WE'VE SEEN WHAT CUT-THROAT COMPETITION CAN DO TO HUMAN BEINGS AND TO THE COUNTRY. JUST REMEMBER THE STORY OF MICHAEL LEWIS. MICHAEL LEWIS GRADUATED FROM PRINCETON UNIVERSITY IN 1982 AND COMPLETED A MASTERS DEGREE IN ECONOMICS FROM THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS TWO YEARS LATER. THEN HE WENT TO WORK AS A TRAINEE AT SALOMON BROTHERS. FIVE YEARS LATER HE WROTE AN EXTRAORDINARY KISS AND TELL BOOK, LIAR'S POKER, CARICATURING THE "CUTTHROAT, COMPETITIVE, AND OFTEN NEUROTIC AND PARANOID" LIFE OF A JORNEYMAN INVESTMENT BANKER IN THE ROARING EIGHTIES. "HALF OF THEM GET THROWN OUT BECAUSE THEY ARE BAD. ANOTHER QUARTER GET MUSCLED OUT BECAUSE OF POLITICS. THE GUYS LEFT BEHIND ARE JUST THE MOST RUTHLESS OF THE BUNCH."

THE FALL OF DREXEL BURNHAM AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE MARKET FOR JUNK BONDS MARKED THE END OF A WILD SPECULATIVE BINGE, WHAT LEWIS CALLED "THE LEVERAGING OF AMERICA."

THE MICHAEL LEWISES OF THE EIGHTIES, THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST AND MOST AMBITIOUS GRADUATES OF THE MOST PRESTIGIOUS UNIVERSITIES, HAVE HAD ENOUGH. THE BLOOM IS OFF THE ROSE. WE'VE BEEN REMINDED THAT UNBRIDLED COMPETITION CAN BE DESTRUCTIVE, YIELDING GREAT DISAPPOINTMENT AND DISSATISFACTION. SOMETHING ELSE IS REQUIRED NOW. IF WE'RE TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE AND LIVEABLE SOCIETY - IF YOUR GENERATION AND MINE ARE TO BUILD A MUTUAL FUTURE - WE CANNOT TALK ABOUT THE ECONOMICS OF COMPETITION WITHOUT ALSO TALKING ABOUT THE ETHIC OF COOPERATION. THIS MEANS RECOGNIZING OUR CAPACITY TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE, TO CREATE A POLITICAL CULTURE THAT NURTURES OBLIGATION AND HONORS TRUST.

THIS IS NOT A NEW IDEA, ALTHOUGH IT IS ONE WIDELY IGNORED OF LATE. THE BUILDING OF THIS COUNTRY WAS A SOCIAL AND NOT A SOLITARY ENDEAVOR. YES, THE RECORD IS DEEPLY STAINED BY CRUELTY, EXPLOITATION, RACISM, AND CHAUVINISM. DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITION THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL, AMERICAS DISPOSSESSED THE NATIVES AND NURTURED SLAVERY IN THE CRADLE OF LIBERTY. BUT THERE IS ANOTHER STRAIN IN OUR HISTORY. WE HEAR A LOT OF CHEST-THUMPING ABOUT RUGGED INDIVIDUALS AND THE SELF-MADE MAN, BUT IT'S BEEN THE ETHIC OF COOPERATION THAT INSPIRED OUR BEST MOMENTS AND OUR MOST ENDURING INSTITUTIONS. THIS TALENT FOR SOCIAL

COOPERATION PROVIDED A RESILIENT ENVIRONMENT FOR CAPITALISM. INDIVIDUAL INITIATIVE SUCCEEDED ONLY IF IT LED TO SYSTEMS OF MUTUAL SUPPORT. "LIVE AND LET LIVE" WASN'T ENOUGH, WE HAD TO MOVE TO THE ACTIVE AND AFFIRMATIVE PHILOSOPHY OF "LIVE AND HELP LIVE." I WOULDN'T SIT IN MY CLEARING IN THE WOODS WHILE YOU SWEATED AND STRAINED ALONE TO RAISE YOUR BARN. I WOULD COME OVER TO HELP, AND IN TIME YOU WOULD RECIPROCATE. THE BARN-RAISING BECAME A SOCIAL ENDEAVOR, ONE OF SOLIDARITY AND CARING. ON THE FRONTIER YOU HELPED TO DELIVER ONE ANOTHER'S BABIES. WHEN A MEMBER OF THE NEIGHBORING FAMILY WAS SICK, YOU TOOK TURNS SITTING AT THE BEDSIDE OR YOU HELPED TO BURY THE DEAD.

I THOUGHT ABOUT THIS JUST LAST MONTH WHEN MY OWN FATHER DIED AT THE AGE OF 86. HE WAS 14 IN THE YEAR 1918 WHEN HIS FATHER DIED DURING A FLU EPIDEMIC. NEIGHBORS WASHED MY GRANDFATHER'S BODY. NEIGHBORS DUG HIS GRAVE. AND NEIGHBORS LAID HIM IN THE EARTH. EVEN AS LATE AS MY HIGH SCHOOL DAYS MY FATHER AND OTHERS WOULD SIT UP ALL NIGHT AT THE FUNERAL HOME BESIDE THE CORPSE OF A FRIEND. "WHY DID YOU DO THAT?" I ASKED. "YOU HAD TO WORK HARD ALL THE NEST DAY DRIVING A TRUCK." HE LOOKED AT ME AND ANSWERED: "BECAUSE IT WAS THE THING WE DID."

THE THING WE DID.

THE ETHIC OF COOPERATION SHAPED OUR LIVES DOWN ON THE FRONTIER OF TEXAS WHERE THE ROBISONS AND POTTERS, DAVIDSONS AND MOYERS TOOK ROOT. NEAR WHERE OLIN AND SYLVIA AND JUDITH AND I FIRST MET AND BECAME FRIENDS, THERE STANDS A MARKER WHICH RECORDS THAT JOHN MCGARRAH BROUGHT HIS FAMILY TO TEXAS IN 1842 AND HERE FOUNDED THE TOWN OF BUCKNER. SOON THEREAFTER A CHURCH WAS BUILT; THAT A SCHOOL; THEN A TRADING POST, INDICATING THAT NEIGHBORS HAD SETTLED NEARBY. FOUR YEARS LATER, ON THE FOURTH OF JULY 1846 JOHN MCGARRAH AND HIS NEIGHBORS ELECTED THEIR FIRST PUBLIC OFFICIALS AND OPENED A POST OFFICE. I STOP AND READ THIS MARKER EVERY TIME I PASS THAT WAY. IT CAPSULES FOR ME THE STORY OF CIVILIZATION, THE PROGRESSION FROM LONELY INITIATIVE TO PUBLIC COOPERATION THROUGH VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS OF MUTUAL HELP: FIRST, THE PRIME FAMILY UNIT; THEN THE WAGON TRAIN; THEN THE CHURCH AND THE SCHOOL FOR WORSHIP AND LEARNING: THEN A TRADING POST FOR THE GOODS OF SURVIVAL AND COMFORT; THEN LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR ROADS AND PUBLIC ORDER; THEN A COMMUNICATIONS OUTPOST -- THE POST OFFICE -- FOR CONTACT WITH OTHERS; AND THEN A PUBLIC HOLIDAY FOR CELEBRATION AND RECREATION.

CIVILIZATION, YOU SEE, IS A WEB OF COOPERATION JOINING PEOPLE TO FAMILY, FRIENDS, COMMUNITIES, AND COUNTRY, CREATING IN EACH OF US A SENSE OF RELIANCE ON THE WHOLE, A RECOGNITION OF THE SELF IN COMPANIONSHIP WITH OTHERS, SHARING A POWERFUL LOYALTIES TO THE COMMON GOOD: "HABITS OF THE HEART," AS A RECENT BOOK NAME CALLED IT. ALL HISTORY HAS BEEN A STRUGGLE TO WIDEN THE CIRCLE OF THE HEART, UNTIL OUR TASK NOW IS TO THROW OUR ARMS AROUND THE WORLD

AND EMBRACE THIS PLANET AS OUR HOME.

BUT I CAN HEAR SOME OF YOU SAY, "MOYERS, YOU'RE JUST BEING ROMANTIC. THE FRONTIER IS LONG GONE. LET THE DEAD BURY THE DEAD. PLEASE MOVE OVER, WE HAVE TO COMPETE."

WELL, YOUR AMERICA IS DIFFERENT. ROBERT REICH TELLS US JUST HOW DIFFERENT IN HIS RECENT BOOK, "TALES OF A NEW AMERICA." BY THE 1980S, RATHER MORE AMERICANS LIVED ON MILITARY BASES THAT LIVED IN WHAT COULD BE CALLED "NEIGHBORHOODS" IN THE TRADITIONAL SENSE (CARD GAMES ON THE FRONT PORCH, KIDS RUNNING OVER LAWNS AND FIELDS, CORNER SODA FOUNTAINS, TOWN MEETINGS, PTAS, ETC). THE MAJORITY OF US LIVED IN SUBURBAN SUBDIVISIONS THAT EXTEND HELTER-SKELTER IN EVERY DIRECTION, BORDERED BY HIGHWAYS AND PUNCTUATED BY LARGE SHOPPING MALLS; OR IN CONDOMINIUMS, TOWNHOUSES, COOPERATIVE APARTMENTS, AND RETIREMENT COMMUNITIES FOR PRIVACY AND SAFETY; OR INHABIT DILAPIDATED HOUSES AND APARTMENTS IN FAR LESS FASHIONABLE AREAS. IT'S COMMON TODAY TO WORK AT SOME DISTANCE FROM HOME AND SOCIALIZE WITH FRIENDS SELECTED ON SOME OTHER BASIS THAN PROXIMITY. WE DON'T HAVE NEIGHBORHOODS THE WAY WE USED TO HAVE, OR THAT COMFORTING SENSE OF COMMUNITY WHERE PEOPLE SHARED ENDURING VALUES. THE LOSS HAS LEFT A VOID IN OUR COLLECTIVE PSYCHE, MAKING US MORE NERVOUS, VULNERABLE, LONELY AND AMENABLE TO NONSENSE, VIOLENCE AND TRIVIA. SO WE SEEK REFUGE IN THE COMFORTABLE LIE RATHER THAN FACE THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH. THE LIE IS JOHN WAYNE. THE TRUTH IS WOODY ALLEN. AND THE FACT IS, THERE'S NO STANDING TALL IN A WORLD OF WOODY ALLENS WITHOUT STANDING TOGETHER.

NOW TOGETHER SEEMS AN UNNATURAL ACT. AND SO IT IS. CIVILIZATION IS NOT NATURAL. IT'S AN ACCOMPLISHMENT OF CULTURE. IT'S POLITICAL; IT'S NOT JUST WHAT HAPPENS; IT IS WHAT WE MAKE HAPPEN. IT'S THE THING WE DO.

AND WE DO IT BECAUSE IT'S COST-EFFICIENT. JOHN MCGARRAH WOULD TELL YOU THAT. BEFORE HE COULD HAVE A TRADING POST, BEFORE HE COULD MAKE HIS OWN BUNDLE, THERE HAD TO BE A COMMUNITY. AND THERE COULDN'T BE A COMMUNITY UNLESS PEOPLE AGREED ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HORSE TRADER AND HORSE THIEF. THE DISTINCTION IS ETHICAL. OTHERWISE, SOCIETY IS A WAR OF ALL AGAINST ALL; A FREE MARKET FOR WOLVES BECOMES A SLAUGHTER FOR THE LAMBS. A STABLE SYSTEM OF LAW, CLEAN AND SAFE STREETS, SCHOOLS WHERE CHILDREN LEARN WHETHER THEY ARE POOR OR RICH, JOBS FOR EVERYONE WHO CAN WORK AND SECURITY FOR THE OLD OR DISABLED - ALL OF THIS IS PART OF THE BARGAIN WE STRIKE WITH EACH OTHER AND THE BARGAIN IS CIVILIZATION.

MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE IS PART OF THE BARGAIN. THE HISTORY OF THIS PLACE IS A REMARKABLE STORY THAT STRUCK MY FANCY WHEN JUDITH AND I FIRST CAME HERE IN 1975. OLIN AND SYLVIA, WITH GORDON, BLAKE, AND MARK, WERE OFFICIALLY BEING WELCOMED ON CAMPUS AND BECAUSE I WAS ONE OF THE SPEAKERS I READ UP ON THE STORY OF THE

COLLEGE. I AM INDEBTED, AS THE COLLEGE COMMUNITY MUST BE, TO DAVID STAMESHKIN FOR THE WORK HE HAS DONE IN RECOLLECTING MIDDLEBURY'S STORY. THEN I COULD LISTEN WITH BENEFIT TO THE GHOSTS. GHOSTS WILL TELL YOU A LOT OF HISTORY IF YOUR IMAGINATION IS WELL-INFORMED. SO ON THAT FIRST NIGHT AFTER OUR ARRIVAL I WENT FOR A WALK ALONE ACROSS THE CAMPUS. IT WAS A FINE VERMONT NIGHT. THE AIR WAS CLEAR AND THE STARS SPARKLED. UP NEAR MEAD CHAPEL I STOOD TO SURVEY THE WHOLE SCENE, ESPECIALLY THE SHAPE AND SHADOWS OF THE TREES IN THE NIGHT LIGHT. TREES TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT HUMAN NATURE. WHERE CIVILIZATION RISES TREES ARE PLANTED BY PEOPLE WHO WILL NOT LIVE TO SIT UNDER THEM. TREES ARE PLANTED FOR THE PLEASURE AND PROFIT OF OTHERS. THEY ARE A STATEMENT OF FAITH ABOUT THE FUTURE, A GIFT TO US FROM STRANGERS WHO PASSED THIS WAY. STAND AMONG THE TREES ON THIS CAMPUS AT NIGHT AND THE GHOSTS WILL TELL YOU QUITE A STORY OF MANY WHO LABORED SO THAT YOU MIGHT REAP.

THE STORY WILL SOON BE 200 YEARS OLD. MIDDLEBURY WAS BORN IN 1800. YOU CAN STILL SEE THE RECORD OF THE FIRST ENTRY OF A BOOK IN THE LIBRARY, DATED IN APRIL OF THAT YEAR, CLOSER TO THE CONDEMNATION OF GALILEO FOR TEACHING THAT THE EARTH IS NOT THE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE, THEN TO MAN'S FIRST FOOTSTEPS ON THE MOON. NAPOLEON BONAPARTE WAS ASSEMBLING HIS TROOPS TO DEFEAT THE AUSTRIANS AT MARCUGO. BEETHOVEN WAS 29 AND HAD JUST HAD HIS FIRST SYMPHONY PERFORMED. LORD BYRON WAS 12, KEATS WAS 5. EMERSON HAD NOT BEEN BORN, NOR HAD VICTOR HUGO, JOHN STUART mILL, MENDELSSOHN, SCHUMANN, OR CHOPIN - OR ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

THERE WERE NO RAILROADS OR HIGHWAYS IN 1800, SO MOST PEOPLE SELDOM TRAVELED FAR FROM HOME. THOMAS JEFFERSON WAS ELECTED PRESIDENT THE YEAR AFTER MIDDLEBURY WAS FOUNDED, AND THE 100-MILE TRIP BETWEEN HIS VIRGINIA HOME AND WASHINGTON CARRIED HIM ACROSS EIGHT RIVERS OF WHICH FIVE HAD NEITHER BRIDGES NOR BOATS. IMAGINE THE FORTITUDE TIMOTHY DWIGHT HAD TO MUSTER TO REACH MIDDLEBURY FROM NEW HAVEN, TO DISCUSS THE PROSPECTS OF PLANTING A COLLEGE HERE. THE POPULATION OF THE COUNTRY WAS JUST OVER 5 MILLION, NEARLY ONE MILLION OF WHOM WERE SLAVES. THE ENTIRE STANDING ARMY OF THE COUNTRY - SOME 4,000 MEN - COULD BE SEATED ON PORTER FIELD'S BLEACHERS (AND I AM SURE THERE HAVE BEEN TIMES DURING THE LAST 15 YEARS WHEN OLIN WISHED THEY WERE!)

VERMONT HAD BEEN IN THE UNION ONLY NINE YEARS. ITS POPULATION WAS 154, 465, OF WHOM 1263 LIVED IN MIDDLEBURY IN 210 HOUSEHOLDS, MOST OF THEM IN HOUSES BUILT OF LOGS. THE TOWN WAS STILL RECOVERING FROM THE TORCHES PUT TO IT BY THE BRITISH IN 1778. THE TOWN COMMONS WAS LITTERED WITH GREAT STUMPS, BUT THE ENTIRE AREA AROUND THE FALLS WAS STILL COVERED WITH A PRIMEVAL STAND OF PINE AND HEMLOCK. MAIL ARRIVED AT THE POST OFFICE ONCE A WEEK, BY STAGE WHEN THE ROADS WERE PASSABLE, OTHERWISE IN SADDLEBAGS.

THIS WAS THE FRONTIER: MUD, COLD, FOLKS HAULING WATER, CHOPPING WOOD, FIGHTING DISEASE, CLEARING LAND, BIRTHING BABIES,

BURYING THE DEAD, PLANTING CROPS AND HARVESTING, AND DOING IT ALL OVER AGAIN AS THE SEASONS CAME AND THE SEASONS WENT. HERE THEY RAISED THIS COLLEGE, ON WILD LANDS OBTAINED FROM THE STATE. JEREMY ATWATER BECAME THE FIRST PRESIDENT AT THE AGE OF 27. BUT LAND WAS ALL THE COLLEGE GOT, AND IT WAS "LEFT LIKE A FOUNDLING CHILD TO STRUGGLE IN ITS WEAKNESS...RECEIVING NOTHING FROM THE COMMONWEALTH BUT A PERMISSION TO LIVE." STILL, IT ATTRACTED 75 STUDENTS AND A FACULTY OF SIX. AT A PUBLIC MEETING IN 1815 ITS NEW AND MAGNETIC PRESIDENT, HENRY DAVIS, RAISED $20,000 IN ONE EVENING FROM TOWN PEOPLE AND FARMERS - MORE FROM SOME, IT WAS SAID, THAN THEY WERE WORTH. BUT THEN AN ACT OF GOD LAID THE COLLEGE LOW. THE GREATEST VOLCANIC EXPLOSION IN HISTORY, ON THE ISLAND OF SUMBAYA IN THE EAST INDIES, SPREAD SUCH A CLOUD OF DUST AND ASH THROUGH THE ATMOSPHERE THAT VAST AREAS OF THE EARTH WERE SCREENED FROM SOLAR RADIATION. THE FOLLOWING SUMMER WAS THE COLDEST IN MEMORY. SNOW FELL ACROSS VERMONT ON THE 8TH OF JUNE. ICE BENT THE TREES, AND A FROST KILLED THE CROPS IN THE GROUND: KILLED THE CORN, POTATOES, PEAS AND FRUIT, AND PEOPLE WERE FORCED TO SURVIVE ON HEDGE HOGS, BOILED NETTLES, AND CLOVER HEADS. ONE MIDDLEBURY SENIOR WROTE THAT "THE JUDGMENT OF HEAVEN SEEMED TO HANG OVER US." WIPED OUT, THOUSANDS OF FARMERS LOADED THEIR FAMILIES AND BELONGINGS ON WAGONS AND HEADED WEST, LEAVING BEHIND UNPAID PLEDGES OF SUPPORT TO MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE. TWO-THIRDS OF THE SUBSCRIPTIONS DISAPPEARED. THE COLLEGE SURVIVED THE YEAR THERE WAS NO SUMMER - BUT BARELY. IT BARELY SURVIVED THE HOT AND HOLY RELIGIOUS WARS THAT BROKE OUT AMONG THE UNITARIANS AND THE CALVINISTS. IT BARELY SURVIVED THE ECONOMIC COLLAPSE OF 1837 AND SIX YEARS OF THE WORST DEPRESSION IN THE NATION'S HISTORY DURING WHICH NEARLY THREE QUARTERS OF ITS STUDENTS DISAPPEARED. THE SCHOOL TEETERED ON THE EDGE OF OBLIVION THROUGH THE CIVIL WAR - DEEPLY IN DEBT, SCARRED BY OLD WOUNDS, SADDENED BY THE LOSS OF ITS SONS TO THE WRATH OF MUSKET AND CANNON. PRESIDENT LARRABEE ROAMED THE COUNTRY LIKE A BEGGAR, PLEADING FOR FUNDS, EVEN TAKING ON THE GIFT OF A COPPER MINE NEAR STAFFORD IN AN EFFORT TO MAKE IT PAY OFF FOR THE COLLEGE. HE PURCHASED THE TOOLS, HIRED THE LABORERS, AND SUPERINTENDED THE WORK, VISITING THE SHAFTS WHEN THE THERMOMETER REGISTERED 25 DEGREES BELOW ZERO.

MIDDLEBURY SURVIVED, BUT BARELY. WHEN CYRUS HAMILL ARRIVED AS PRESIDENT (HE HAD RUN A BAKERY IN CONSTANTINOPLE WHERE HE ALSO SET UP A NEW-FANGLED LAUNDRY TO RID BRITISH UNIFORMS OF VERMIN DURING THE CRIMEAN WAY) ONE OF THE TRUSTEES TOLD HIM HE HAD COME TO ATTEND A FUNERAL, AND KNEW HE WOULD PERFORM IT WITH HONOR. THE OBITUARY WAS PREMATURE. MIDDLEBURY SURVIVED, SO THAT IN HIS INAUGURAL ADDRESS PRESIDENT EZRA BRAINERD COULD SAY: "THERE IS A MORAL CERTAINTY THAT SOONER OR LATER THIS COLLEGE WILL BE ABLE TO COMMAND ALL THE RESOURCES THAT SHE NEEDS...MEANWHILE, MAY GOD BLESS OUR DEAR OLD ALMA MATER, AND LET ALL THE ALUMNI SAY AMEN."

ONE BY ONE THE SUCCESSION LENGTHENED. JOHN MARTIN THOMAS FOLLOWED BRAINERD; PAUL DWIGHT MOODY FOLLOWED THOMAS; THEN CAM SAMUEL STRATTON, JAMES ARMSTRONG, AND IN 1975 - OLIN ROBISON.

THROUGH CHALLENGE AFTER CHALLENGE, CRISIS AFTER CRISIS, THEY WROTE THE CHAPTERS OF THIS REMARKABLE STORY - OF HARD TIMES AND GOOD, THE ENDLESS SUPPLICATION OF FUNDS, THE LONG AND DRONING MEETINGS, DISPUTES OVER GREAT MATTERS AND SMALL, OVER TENURE AND INVESTMENTS AND WINTER TERMS OVER OVER CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION AND PLUMBING, OVER NATIONAL POLICY AND LOCAL ROADS, THROUGH SEVEN WARS AND CAMPUS FEUDS TOO NUMEROUS TO BE COUNTED OR REMEMBERED.

EACH ONE PLANTED TREES THEY WOULD NEVER SIT UNDER. THEY PLANTED THEM FOR YOU, AND FOR ALL THE GRADUATES TO COME. IF YOU WISH A MONUMENT TO VISION, TO SACRIFICE, AND TO LOVE - IF YOU WANT A LIVING TRIBUTE TO THE PHILOSOPHY OF "LIVE AND HELP LIVE" - LOOK AROUND. THIS COLLEGE IS PART OF THE BARGAIN, AND THE BARGAIN IS CIVILIZATION.

SO I COME TO THE ONE POINT I SAID I WOULD MAKE. HERE IT IS...A SIMPLE LOAF OF BREAD. BREAD EQUALS LIFE, AND WE SOMETIMES TAKE IT FOR GRANTED AS WE DO LIFE. ON THE FRONTIER THEY HAD TO PRODUCE THIS FOR THEMSELVES. BUT YOU AND I WILL A THOUSAND AND MORE TIMES REPEAT THE ORDINARY EXPERIENCE OF EATING BREAD WITH NO THOUGHT FOR THE PROCESS ITSELF. OTHERS DID THIS FOR US - PLANTED THE SEED AND GATHERED ITS HARVEST, SHIPPED THE GRAIN TO THE MILL, BAKED AND WRAPPED THE LOAF, TRANSPORTED IT TO THE WHOLESALER AND THEN TO THE STORE, AND STACKED IT ON THE SHELF. YOU AND I MERELY PICK IT UP, WITHOUT A THOUGHT OF ITS JOURNEY OR THE SCORES OF STRANGERS WHO PRODUCED IT. IT THEY FAIL US, WE STARVE. IF WE CANNOT GIVE THEM SOMETHING OF VALUE IN RETURN, WE FAIL THEM. BREAD AND LIFE ARE SHARED REALITIES. NO ONE PRAYS THE LORD'S PRAYER IN THE FIRST-PERSON SINGULAR. IT IS NOT "GIVE ME THIS DAY MY DAILY BREAD." IT IS ALWAYS, "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD." BREAD AND LIFE ARE SHARED REALITIES. SO IS MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE. IT IS THIS ETHIC OF OBLIGATION - LIVE AND HELP LIVE - WHICH INSPIRES MEN AND WOMEN TO PLANT TREES THEY WILL NEVER SIT UNDER AND TO BUILD COLLEGES FOR GENERATIONS NOT THEIR OWN.

MY POINT IS NOT ORIGINAL. WE JOURNALISTS ARE BEACHCOMBERS ON THE SHORE'S OF OTHER PEOPLE'S WISDOM. SO I CLOSE WITH THE VISION OF A YOUNG WRITER IN CALIFORNIA. IT'S MY PLAGIARIZED GIFT TO YOU:

"THE DREAM WE MUST NOW SEEK TO REALIZE, THE NEW HUMAN PROJECT, IS NOT 'SECURITY', WHICH IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ACHIEVE ON THE PLANET EARTH IN THE LATTER HALF OF THE 20TH CENTURY. IT IS NOT 'HAPPINESS,' BY WHICH WE GENERALLY MEAN NOTHING BUT GIDDY FORGETFULNESS ABOUT THE DANGER OF ALL OUR LIVES TOGETHER. IT IS NOT 'SELF-REALIZATION,' BY WHICH PEOPLE USUALLY MEAN A SEPARATE PEACE. THERE IS NO SEPARATE PEACE.....THE REAL PROJECT IS TO REALIZE THAT TECHNOLOGY HAS MARRIED US ALL TO EACH OTHER...THAT UNTIL WE ARE MORE COURAGEOUS ABOUT THIS NEW MARRIAGE -- OURSELVES ALL INTERTWINED -- THERE WILL BE NO PEACE AND THE DESTINATION OF ANY OF US WILL BE UNKNOWN...MEN AND WOMEN, BLACK, BROWN, YELLOW, WHITE, YOUNG AND OLD. . .WE MUST GO WHEREVER IT IS WE ARE GOING TOGETHER. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS BEING ALONE. IF YOU ARE THE

ONLY ONE IN THE ROOM, IT IS STILL A CROWDED ROOM. BUT WE ARE ALL TOGETHER ON THIS PLANET, YOU, ME, US: INNER, OUTER, TOGETHER, AND WE'RE CALLED TO AFFIRM OUR MARRIAGE VOWS. OUR PROJECT IS TO LEARN HOW TO CONSUMMATE, HOW TO SUSTAIN, HOW TO ENJOY THIS MOST HUMAN MARRIAGE -- ALL PARTS, ALL OF US."

THANK YOU.